

The Rise of Mesopotamian City-States

Conclusion

The first Sumerian city-states were well-protected regions on the southern Mesopotamian plains. These city-states were designed with villages and farmlands surrounding a central city. Some scholars believe that city-states grew out of cities' need to protect themselves from their neighbors during times of war. For this reason, Sumerian city-states had high walls that stretched for as far as six miles around the city. According to the Sumerian "Epic of Gilgamesh," these strong walls had bronze entrance gates and were built of sun-dried brick that seemed to possess the "brilliance of copper." People also dug moats around the city walls to prevent enemies from entering. Most people's homes were located inside the city walls, while their farms lay outside. During a military attack, people living outside of the city's walls fled inside the city for protection.

About 15 city-states arose in the Tigris-Euphrates river valley. Many city-states may have had a population as great as 50,000 people. Near the center of the city were houses that belonged to members of the upper class, which included priests and merchants. Upper-class houses were two stories high and had woolen carpets and whitewashed mud walls. Located near the houses of the rich were one-story, middle-class homes, belonging to crafts-people and some government officials. Ordinary or lower-class Sumerians, such as fishermen and some farmers, lived in small, mud-brick houses at the edge of the city. Finally, slaves owned no property and lived in their owners' houses. Members of each city-state worshipped the city-state's particular God and paid taxes to their government and king.

What do you find most surprising, interesting, or noteworthy about the rise of Mesopotamian city-states?